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ABSTRACT

This document is a compilation of poems and ideas for teaching poetry in the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom. A list of poetry anthologies is also provided. (Contains 51 references.) (KFT)

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THURSTON

ED 454 724

Roses

Aren't Always

Red:

Poetry as a Second Language

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July 30, 1998

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Marinating Kids in Poetry: Some Ways

1. Bring in wide range of poetry through out the year, not just when you plan to have kids write it. Genres emerge naturally from the kinds of literture kids are exposed to.

2. Don't analyze poetry; Enjoy it through performances.
   -Act out poems in groups---allow for wide ranges of interpretation.
   -Choral and Echo Readings of Poetry
   -Assign voices (girls/boys, this half of the class/that half of the class, low/high voices)
   -Beat out the rhythm
   -Dramatic Poetry Readings by Individuals

3. Hang Poetry around the room
   -illustrate poems
   -write them on special kinds of paper, with special pens
   -if you have access to computers, play with fonts & type size graphics

4. Have a poetry corner--with poetry books, a listening station, class anthologies, etc...

5. Play recordings of poets reading their own poems; Record students reading their poems and poems by others.

3. Have students create poetry anthologies
   -A collective anthology of class favorites
   -Individual student anthologies of favorites, or poems by one author, or on one subject or theme (SEE ARTICLE: Poetry is directions for your imagination.)

4. Have students bring in their favorite poem, playground chant, nursery rhyme to share with others.

5. Have kids memorize poetry.

6. Have kids write their own poetry timelines--what role has poetry played at different stages in their lives. This uncovers data for teachers about how students think and feel about poetry.

SOME DO's FOR DISCUSSING POETRY

1. Ask about what the poem
   ---reminds them of in their own lives
   ---tell the words, phrases, images that really stand out for you
   ---create their own questions for class discussion

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Poetry: Some Forms

Limerick (A-A-B-B-A)

An old ESOL teacher from Nome
Got lost when he started to roam.
He encountered a moose
Who said, "Goodness! Great Zeus!
Don't Juneau that there's no place like home?"
by Les Greenblatt

Haiku (5-7-5)

frogs lilyponding,
ceaselessly croaking 'neath smooth
satin moonlight--Shhh

Cinquain

noun
adjective, adjective
three word sentence
four participles
noun

Ball
round, smooth
I grab it
bouncing, dribbling, passing, shooting
Basket!

List poem

Knoxville, Tennessee

I always like summer
best
you can eat fresh corn
from daddy's garden
and okra
and greens
and cabbage
and lots of
barbecue
and buttermilk
and homemade ice cream
at the church picnic
and listen to
gospel music
outside
at the church
homecoming
and go to the mountains with
your grandmother
and go barefooted
and be warm
all the time
not only when you go to bed
and sleep
by Nikki Giovanni

A Writing Project: Training Teachers of Composition from Kindergarten to College. (1985). Daniels, H. & Zemelman, S. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

VARIATION The diamante is another poetic form that lends itself to this moment in the workshop—mostly because its rules are so rigid. The diamante takes this structure:

NOUN
ADJECTIVE ADJECTIVE
VERB VERB VERB
PARTICIPLE PARTICIPLE PARTICIPLE PARTICIPLE
VERB VERB VERB
ADJECTIVE ADJECTIVE
NOUN

Put this model up on the board, explain it, and give people about ten minutes to concoct their own. If people are fearful about beginning, suggest that they fill in the top box with "something you'd never find in a poem." You can also suggest that they work toward some movement or relationship (e.g., opposites) between the top word and the bottom word.

EXAMPLES

Orkin
efficient effective
spray kill destroy
gasping panting kicking dying
sneak hide wait
clever forever
cockroaches

English
Alive Vital
Reading Writing Discussing
Talk Think Debate Listen
Lecturing Drilling Testing
Numb Hazy
Sleep

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EXAMPLES

Preposition Poems

THOUGHTS

In the forest
Under the tree
Near the lake
On my knees

Of faith
In earnest
Without doubt
To God

Betty Riebock

DEAR CUSTOMER:

Unless your payment is received
At our office
By noon on Friday
On you go
In accordance with established procedures
To our Adjustment Department
For collection.

In the morning, dunning letters
At work, chats with your supervisor
At night, annoying phone calls.

Around you, beside you, behind you
Everywhere
After your money
On your case
Without mercy
Until you pay.
Have a nice day.

Col Cutler

Headline Hunting works fine as either an individual or a group game. The idea is to cut out a lot of newspaper headlines and play around with them until you get words that say something to *you*. These steps will work:

Getting Ready

1 Find out whether Headline Hunting is to be done in class or out of class. (We recommend you play this at home.)

2 Find a bigger working space than you think you will need.

3 Allow more time than you think you will need.

4 You will need *(a)* scissors; *(b)* glue, paste, or tape; and *(c)* one complete newspaper.

Working

5 Cut and trim forty or more headlines that have something interesting in them—including just good single words. ("Seeing Double?" on page 32 began from sixty headlines.)

6 For convenience, use mainly headlines that measure under one half inch in height.

7 *Before cutting any headline, check the back side of the page to see what other headline you may be cutting into.*

8 In addition to headlines, use picture captions, if you want to. *But do not use ads. None!*

Making the Poem

9 Allow plenty of time to discover connections and surprises in the headlines. Arrange them in many different ways. Use single words or phrases or both.

10 When you have figured out the arrangement of your poem, trim the pieces you plan to use and arrange them on page 34. Then stick them on.

Headline Hunting

Seeing Double?

800-Pound **Soprano**
With Big Eyes, And Knickers
Wants To Reduce

Florist Finds Solution

Eat Likely **Surprises**

Young **Roots And Tree Leaves**
Hurt ***Horsemeat***

Big Physical **Trout**

Cool Chile
Dead *Garbage*
And Trolls

By Starving Tonnage Shows Decrease

So Hang On

—Stephen Dunning

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE POEM

I am	(an adjective & noun)
I wonder if	(something you wonder about)
I hear	(imaginary sound)
I see	(imaginary sight)
I want to be	(your goal)
I am	(an adjective & noun)
I pretend	(what you pretend to do)
I feel	(your feelings)
I touch	(imaginary thing to touch)
I worry	(what you worry about)
I cry	(what makes you sad)
I am	(an adjective and noun)
I understand	(something you know)
I say	(something you say)
I dream	(something you dream about)
I try	(something you try to do)
I hope	(something you hope for)
I am	(an adjective and noun)

NAME _____ DATE _____

FIVE-SENSE POEMS

Describe an emotion by using your senses. First give the emotion a color (sight). Then tell how it smells, tastes, sounds, and feels.

Loneliness is grey.

It sounds like a vacant room.
It feels like a toothache.
It smells like an empty house.
It tastes like liver.

Success is red.

It sounds like claps and cheers.
It feels like a pat on the back.
It smells like flowers in the spring.
It tastes as sweet as a mother's kiss.

Now you try it. Here are some suggestions for topics: embarrassment, fear, love, humor, boredom, or hatred.

_____ is _____
(emotion) (color)

It sounds like _____

It feels like _____.

It smells like _____.

It tastes like _____.

Here is space for you to try a second one. Perhaps you would like to rearrange the order this time.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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From Writers Express, Kemper, D., Nath..., R. & Sebranek, P. (1995). Burlington, WI: Write Source.

I V TE T

Poets have fun inventing new forms of poetry. Here are some invented forms to try.

Alphabet Poetry ● An alphabet poem uses a part of the alphabet to create a funny list poem.

Cats
Don't
Ever
Fly (willingly)

Concrete Poetry ● This is poetry in which the shape or design helps express the meaning or feeling of the poem.

The way to school is d o w n
W I D E streets
FULLOFBIGPEOPLE!!!!!

Definition Poetry ● This is poetry that defines a word or an idea creatively.

FRIENDSHIP
Friendship is like stars in the
sky. Like going
to fly with Peace,
and the moon shines
on us while we fly. We walk
through the sky and clouds. And we
share the future in a treasure
chest, topped with diamonds. —Jessamyn Ansary

Five W's Poetry ● Each line in this type of poem answers one of the 5 W's (who? what? where? when? and why?).

I
Love to blade
Along Venice Beach
In the middle of the day
Because people are friendly and get out of your way.

-Sandy Lyne

POEM SKETCHING: This is a technique for collecting and combining words into sentences that "feel" like poems. In a Poem Sketch, we take the four words in a word-group and put them into sentences that fit together and make sense. Guidelines: 1) Re-combine the word-groups if you like. 2) Change the forms of the words if you like. 3) Get the four words into three or more sentences. 4) Do not rhyme.

Example:

frog cloud pond morning-glories

Clouds open up like
huge, white *morning-glories*.
Reflected in the *pond*,
they make a path of lily-pads--
some green, some white,
some real, some not.
Look carefully, little *frog*,
before you leap
on the Springtime morning.

---

coins	hours	shore
leaves	private	robes
heart	life	king
sky	dream	lake
gardens	love	elf
roots	spirit	snow
silence	energy	log
wind	night	alone
roses	God	book
light	ocean	woods
touch	cloud	moss
wall	prayer	dream

---

blind	breath	berries	harvest	dragon	sleeve
fingers	sunrise	stones	friends	leaves	hut
mirror	words	Summer	wind	smoke	bowl
wait	green	path	field	rake	tears
father	silver	shadow	rain	ladder	supper
hoe	moth	blossom	river	heaven	bread
sundown	candle	window	cattails	barn	water
dust	wings	hush	boys	hay	kiss
mountain	purple	lamp	moon	geese	pencil
gold	year	slave	tired	rowboat	paper
water	Emperor	gate	fireflies	chill	breeze
life	joy	grave	jar	south	poem
pines	town	faucet	orchards	snowflake	ditch
needles	roads	rainbow	heavy	bamboo	rat
notes	hill	sparrow	apples	listen	soul
mist	goodbye	song	frost	awake	moon
girls	rooster	pond	sidewalk	weeds	canoe
sleep	legs	rain-drop	wagon	secrets	rope
forest	restless	circles	insects	mice	heron
beauty	grass	frog	glory	nests	dawn
pinecone	floor	childhood	melodies	creek	
owl	homesick	snow	mother	whispers	
twilight	bed	fence	pillow	butteflies	
star	dark	gate	face	fish	

POEM-SKETCHING--STUDENT SAMPLES:

elf log snow alone

HAPPY

Happy by myself sitting by a car.
Being *alone* in the *snow* sitting by a *log*.
I feel like an *elf*,
a peasant who knows nothing.
I am the smallest one around.

-Kevin Hammond, grade 5

field fox butterfly wall

SHORTCUT

The shortcut takes me through *fields* of flowers,.
And past *walls* of trees where *foxes* live,
And flitting *butterflies*.
Past all these things I hurry by.
I ignore all of them, each and every one,
Not so sure I'm glad I took
The shortcut to adulthood.

-Alex Shangraw, grade 6

freckles beauty sundown world

THE BEAUTY OF THE NIGHT

Beauty does not bless those with *freckles* on their nose.
I'm no exception to the rule.
But at *sundown* the sky transforms into the darkest shadow.
Under it I hide and the *world* can't see.
With the night on my nose I possess *beauty*.

-Jennifer Sadler. grade 11

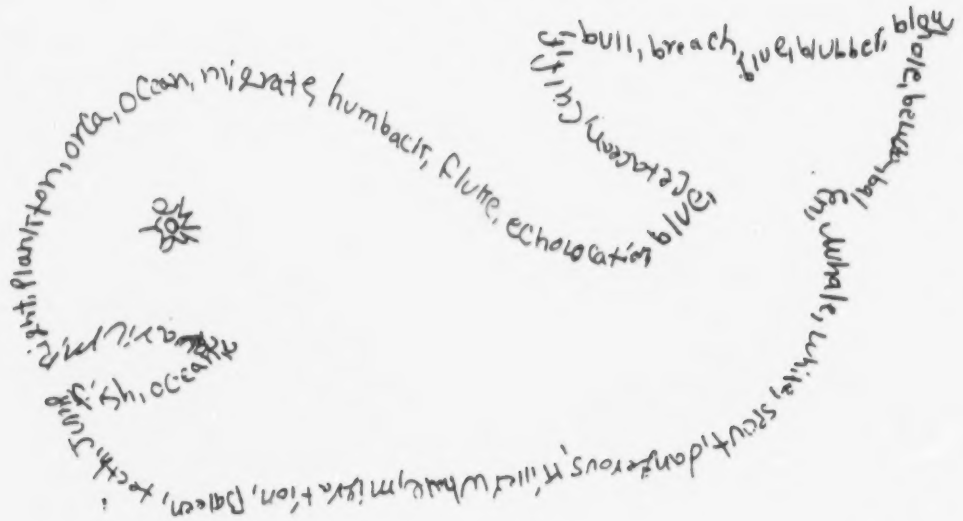
trees roots death rain

ROOTS

The *trees* are crying
So is the girl under them
The *roots* of both have been torn
A *death* in her family
And another *rain*forest gone

-Tiffany Ione Scholes, grade 7

Carolina
Lucero


blow, bubbles, bull, breach, fluke, beluga, blowhole, humpback whale, sperm whale, sea, south, dangerous, migration, Baleen, tooth, jump, right, plankton, orca, ocean, migrate, humback, flume, echolocation, blue, Cetacean, Gulf, whale, occean

"I Am" Poem

The "I Am" poem is not only appropriate for adolescents but often very revealing to both themselves and their teacher. Because it is a patterned poem, they can concentrate on the content without having to worry about form.

Pattern

1st stanza
I am (two special characteristics you have)*
I wonder (something you are curious about)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I see (an imaginary sight)
I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

2nd stanza
I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that really bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you very sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

3rd stanza
I understand (something you know is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you actually dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

Student poem

I am a carefree girl who loves horses.
I wonder if there is a horse that can fly.
I hear the stomping of a hundred mustangs on the desert in Arabia.
I see a horse with golden wings soaring into the sunset.
I want to ride swiftly over a green meadow.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I pretend to be an Olympic jumper.
I feel the sky pressing down on me as I ride along a sandy shore.
I touch the clouds on a winged horse.
I worry that I'll fall off and become paralyzed.
I cry when a colt dies.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I understand that I will not be able to ride every day of my life.
I say let all horses roam free.
I dream about the day when I have a horse of my own.
I try to be the best rider in the world.
I hope to ride all my life.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

* avoid the obvious and the ordinary such as "I am a 13-year-old boy with brown hair." That doesn't make you distinctive since there are millions of 13-year-old boys with brown hair. "I am a girl who bruises easily and believes in astrology . . . when the stars are right." That's better because it gives a sense of the speaker and how she is different from other people.

Hero Poem

The hero poem describes a person rather than an image or feeling though it includes images and feelings. The hero selected may often provide insight into an adolescent's interests and aspirations.

Pattern

Line 1: A person you admire
Line 2: Three words to describe the person
Line 3: Place, group, or activity identified with the person
Line 4: Three action words (*-ing* words) for the person
Line 5: When or where the actions take place
Line 6: Thoughts or feelings about the person

Student poems

Anne Frank
Young, pretty, happy
Teenage writer
Hiding, growing, learning
During World War II
Her words will live forever.

Nelson Mandela
Proud, kind, strong
South African
Struggling, leading, surviving
In his homeland
A role model for all people.

Gloria Estefan
Pretty, dark, Latina
Singer with Miami Sound Machine
Dancing, smiling, singing
On stage
Talented and strong.

Mother Theresa
Mature, loving, holy
Nobel Peace Prize winner
Serving, helping, healing
In Calcutta, India
She is filled with goodness.

Blotz poem

The Blotz poem takes a vivid imagination and can help students develop a working knowledge of both the use of a thesaurus and alliteration. Middle school/junior high students can have fun with it and practice a skill at the same time.

Pattern

Line 1: Name your creature. (This is a . . .)
Line 2: Tell where your creature lives (using words--4 or more--that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).
Line 3: Tell what your creature eats (using words--4 or more--that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).
Line 4: Tell what your creature likes (using words--4 or more--that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).
Line 5: Tell something about your creature (using words--3 or more--that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).
Line 6: Tell something about what your creature did to you (using words--3 or more--that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).

Student poem

This is a teacherian.
Teacherians live in Turkish towers on top of telegraph transmitters in Tibet.
Teacherians eat tortoise toes, tangy tarts, tender toast, and tuna.
Teacherians throw temper tantrums, torment students, try on toupees, and twiddle their thumbs.
Teacherians teach trigonometry, enjoy tapestry, and like tanning their temples.
This teacherian told me to tape up my mouth. It tortured me and tore out my teeth.

I wish

Wish poems usually have a theme such as colors, foods, animals, places, weather, gifts, etc. They can be any length and are appropriate for all ages. They are unrhymed and every line begins "I wish."

Pattern

Line 1: I wish . . .
Line 2: I wish . . .
Line 3: I wish . . .
etc.

Student poems

I wish I had red hair done up in braids.
I wish I had velvet brown eyes.
I wish I had a soft sky blue dress.
I wish I had a heart of gold.

I wish for taco-flavored ice cream.
I wish for chocolate-covered bees' knees.
I wish I had a mint pancake.
I wish I had maple-flavored fried chicken.
I wish I could have an ice cream pizza.

News Poem

The news poem calls for an eye for figurative language and an ability to re-order that language. Using a news story, the poet selects the figurative language that tells the story succinctly and then uses those words and phrases in his poem. Because of the level of reading of most newspapers, it is more appropriate for middle school/junior high students.

News story pattern

East German hit in legs,
shots thwart escape

Berlin (AP) A would-be refugee was wounded by East German machine gun fire at about noon Sunday as he dashed through border installations toward the Berlin wall, West German police reported.

They said the man was struck in the legs by some of the 20 shots fired and knocked to the ground about 100 yards short of the WALL as he was attempting to cross the control strip some 30 yards wide, that separate East Berlin buildings from the Wall.

Witnesses, including two American military policemen, said East German soldiers dragged the wounded man to a watch tower from where he was later taken away in a jeep.

It was the first outbreak of shooting along the demaraction line since the signing Friday of the Big Four pact aimed at easing tensions in and around the divided city.

Student poem

He dashed through border installations,
A would-be refugee.
Twenty shots fired.
Knocked to the ground
One hundred yards short of the Wall.
Wounded, dragged to a watch tower,
Taken away in a jeep.

Additional patterned poems from Ruth Devlin, Gene Ward Elementary School teacher

Contrast

A contrast poem is four lines contrasting items found in the environment, in life, in a book, etc. The first three lines are related, and the fourth line is the contrast.

The sky is over my head.
The birds are over my head.
The clouds are over my head.
The ants are under my feet.

The red hen planted the grain.
The red hen harvested the crop.
The red hen baked the bread.
The dog, goose, and cat didn't work.

Alphabet

An alphabet poem is one way to list objects or thoughts. The list must be in alphabetical order, with the item listed beginning with the same letter as the first letter of the line.

A is the ant in my kitchen.
B is the basketball my son bounces outside.
C is the cat mewing pitifully at my back door.
D is the delivery truck rumbling down the street.
E is the elephant that Katie is drawing for me.
. . .
Z is the zipper I zip on my suitcase when I leave for vacation.

Countdown

A countdown is a poem in which each line starts with a number. The items listed belong together in some way (content area, thematic unit, concept, etc.). An ending line of closure is optional. There is no set number of lines for this poem.

One child picks a long-stemmed dandelion.
Two birds sing songs in their nest.
Three mountains glow orange from the sinking sun.
Four cicadas sing rhythmic songs.
Five tulips begin to close their velvet petals.
These evening hours stay close to my heart.

Alliterative poem

Alliterative poems use several identical initial consonants in each line.

The wild wind whirls and whips
My hair higher than my head
Making me
Delightfully dizzy.

Shouting children shake and shimmy to the beat
Of metal music making boxes
That they set out on the street.
The sweltering sun finally makes them sullen with the heat,
So they wade in shallow water which
Cools their little feet.

Fabrication

A poetic fabrication is a literary device that looks at the truth of things and then alters it. The more fantastic the better the fabrication. There is no particular form to follow.

My quiet street
Filled with a herd of elephants
Dancing in green velvet slippers
And eating carrots with a spoon.

Poetic form sentences

These sentence patterns can form poems.

A _____ is _____.
A _____ is _____.
A _____ is _____.
But a _____ isn't _____.

On Monday I saw _____.
On Tuesday I touched _____.
On Wednesday I heard _____.
On Thursday I tasted _____.
On Friday I smelled _____.

_____ is its color.
The _____ of the _____.
The _____ of the _____.
The _____ of the _____.
The _____ of the _____!

I like _____.
I like _____.
I like _____.
But I don't like _____.

Farewell to _____.
Hello to _____.
Farewell to _____.
Hello to _____.
It's (season), it's (season), it's (season)!

Line 1 Where it happens.
Line 2 What is happening.
Line 3 When it occurs.

Catalogue

Catalogue verse focuses on listing verbs that describe how something moves or acts or both. The last line tells what the category is.

Jumping
Running
Laughing
Crying
Skating
Rolling
Giggling
Eating
Playing
Growing
Kids, kids, kids!

This and the previous five pages were compiled by:

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April Rain Song

Let the rain _____ you.

Let the rain _____ upon your head with _____.

Let the rain sing you a _____.

The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.

The rain makes running pools in the gutter.

The rain plays a little sleep-song on our roof at night--

And I love the rain.

—Langston Hughes

Line Breaks and White Space

Line Breaks: Recopy the poem below onto another piece of paper, putting in line breaks wherever you think they fit. We will ask you why you made these choices.

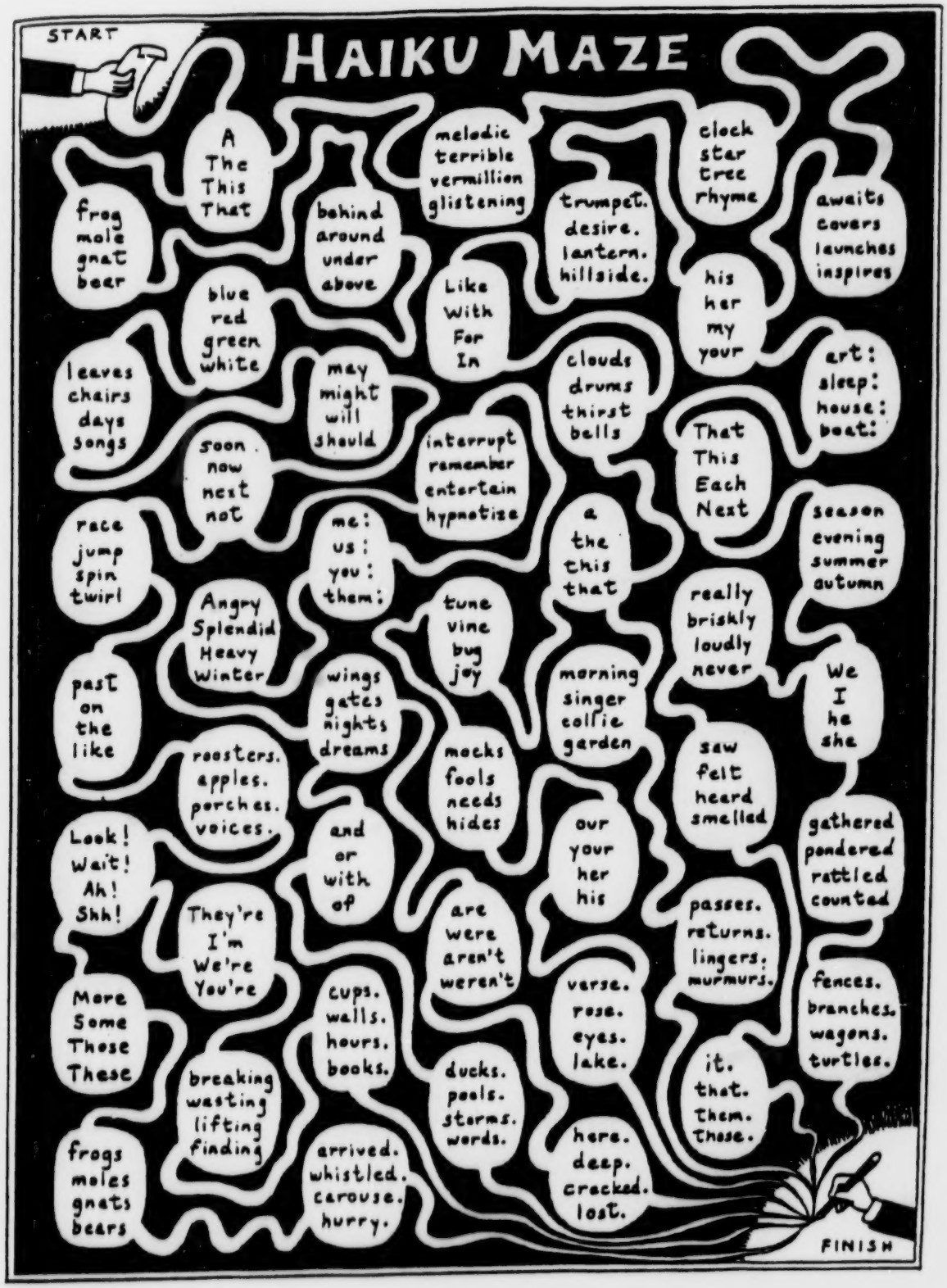
This Is Just to Say I have eaten the plums that were in the icebox which you were probably saving for breakfast forgive me they were delicious so sweet and so cold

^ * ^ * ^ * ^ * ^ * ^ * ^ * ^ * ^ * ^ * ^ * ^

White space: Cut the poem below into "chunks" that belong together. Glue them onto a blank piece of paper. Think of the paper as a canvas and you are a painter. You may use any part of the canvas you wish. We will ask you why you made these choices.

Young Woman at a Window She sits with tears on her cheek her cheek on her hand her child in her lap his nose pressed to the glass.

Both poems by William Carlos Williams



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"You Have To Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand"

What is it like to be an outsider?
What is it like to sit in the class where everyone has blond hair and you have black hair?
What is it like when the teacher says, "Whoever wasn't born here raise your hand."
And you are the only one.
Then, when you raise your hand, everybody looks at you and makes fun of you.
You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when the teacher treats you like you've been here all your life?
What is it like when the teacher speaks too fast and you are the only one who can't understand what he or she is saying, and you try to tell him or her to slow down.
Then when you do, everybody says, "If you don't understand, go to a lower class or get lost."
You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you are an opposite?
When you wear the clothes of your country and they think you are crazy to wear these clothes and you think they are pretty.
You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you are always a loser?
What is it like when somebody bothers you when you do nothing to them?
You tell them to stop but they tell you that they didn't do anything to you.
Then, when they keep doing it until you can't stand it any longer, you go up to the teacher and tell him or her to tell them to stop bothering you.
They say that they didn't do anything to bother you.
Then the teacher asks the person sitting next to you.
He says, "Yes, she didn't do anything to her" and you have no witness to turn to.
So the teacher thinks you are a liar.
You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you try to talk and you don't pronounce the words right?
They don't understand you.
They laugh at you but you don't know that they are laughing at you, and you start to laugh with them. They say, "Are you crazy, laughing at yourself? Go get lost, girl."
You have to live in somebody else's country without a language to understand.

What is it like when you walk in the street and everybody turns around to look at you and you don't know that they are looking at you.
Then, when you find out, you want to hide your face but you don't know where to hide because they are everywhere.
You have to live in somebody else's country to feel it.

Noy Chou, Ninth grade,
Reprinted from
Locked In/Locked Out, Tracking and Placement Practices in Boston Public Schools,
Boston, 1990.

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Chronicles

Untitled

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In the poem below, Kari Larsen expresses the pain and sense of loss felt by a child whose country has been ravaged by war. Kari was born in Vietnam sometime in 1971. In the fall of 1973, her village was destroyed. Only a few small children survived the attack; Kari, then known as "Hang," was among them. She was adopted by her new family in 1974. Ms. Larsen searches for a remembrance of her heritage through a poetic vision of her birth mother and expresses her hope to be remembered in return.

this is a poem to my birth mother
whom I never knew

whose sorrow filled Asian eyes,
lovely golden brown complexion,
and raven black hair
are all a figment of my imagination;
for I was too young then,
to now recall your face

I have felt your presence and love often
and you will never be forgotten,
I am a part of you
and I hope you haven't forgotten me

the Vietnam War, the war that separated us,
the war that killed millions
the war that left millions lonely and homeless

it's about you, mother,
about how I wondered
how you are
if you're content, sad, or lonely

I wish that I had a memory of you
a memory of you and I together
so I write this poem to you,
my birth mother whom I never knew

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13
Poetry Is Like

An image is a group of words in which the sum is greater than the parts. Any use of figurative language can be considered an image, which generally uses visual and physical language to achieve an effect.

Complete the simile "poetry is like" with an image that conveys any aspect of the possibilities of poetry or your feelings about poetry. Write as many as you can in ten minutes. Since the possibilities for poetry are limitless, so are the responses to this assignment. Don't hesitate to contradict yourself from one image to the next, since one's attitude toward poetry can change from one moment to the next.

Read the responses out loud; usually, several will elicit laughter, especially from younger students. This exercise is quick, easy, and fun. It can set the stage for future activities by letting students know that creative writing is a wide-open field. Also, it is good practice at image-making, without the pressure of finding contexts for the images.

As the students are writing, I scamper around the classroom, reminding them to be specific. For example, the response "poetry is doing something you can't really do" is not an image; it is abstract, with no appeal to the senses. I asked the author to be specific about something he couldn't do, and he wrote "poetry is like tunneling through a rock with bare hands."

When students are stuck, you can use this formula to bail them out: ask them to tell you something they hate and something they love. Then suggest they combine the two somehow. One student responded by saying she loved spaghetti and hated spinach. Then she wrote: "Poetry is like eating all the spaghetti in the world and dumping the spinach into the Atlantic Ocean."

When results are being read aloud, pause to discuss images that say something important about poetry, thus introducing notions that might be helpful later. "Poetry is like mixing a color with another one" makes the point that writers combine words to create new entities.

Students should allow some of the images to form themselves, without consciously trying to say something about poetry. If an image is beautiful or disturbing or in any other way compelling, that in itself makes a point about poetry.

These responses make direct comments about poetry or the creative process:

Poetry is like:

a world in a head
combing your hair when you're in a rush
newborn pains in the neck
closets opening and closing
when your fish jumps out of the fishbowl to see what it's like out there
a stick of dynamite that's going to keep blowing up no matter what
touching a cactus without being stung
the moon because it floats all over the world
the times of your sloppy life
painting without paint
something falling out of the sky, it's very fragile, you want to catch it before it breaks
when a person runs into another person shopping
when you feel like your brains have drained down to your feet

The following are good images that would not have been born without this assignment; they can be used in future writings:

a hamster running under a bed
the sadness when you see a kitten and you're not able to touch it because you're allergic
a clown sinking in the sand
smelling the taste of strawberry ice cream
looking at a puppy in the window of a closed pet shop
a pizza on the blackboard
going into the woods and listening to the giggling of the streams
a leaf dripping off a deer

One of my favorite responses to this assignment is one which, although it doesn't meet my definition of an image, says a lot about the power of poetry: "Poetry is finding out that you're not really dumb."

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11 Tips for Making a Poem

You don't want to follow rules when you write, but it's helpful to remember certain things before you pick up your pen:

1. Focus on one image or scene. If you try to tell too much of a story, your poem will be difficult to handle. Likewise, not starting with any image means that you'll probably make several false starts.

2. The narrative (what's happening) should be clear to a reader by the time the poem is finished.

3. Try to use language that is colorful, surprising, and musical. For example, apple trees that are heavy with fruit can be described as "apple trees weighed low."

4. Make sure each line is interesting and pulls its weight. Try not to end a line with weak words such as the, and, of, a , or is.

5. Choose a title that adds something to the poem. It could provide important information that isn't given elsewhere, or it may hint at some important themes.

6. Create a mood for the reader.

7. Make sure that the poem is more than just a lot of descriptions. Images should work toward a climax or transformation.

8. Make every word count. Try to avoid repeating words or using more than you need to.

9. Give readers the actual experience instead of summarizing it. Instead of saying that ice is cold, make us feel it on our fingers and tongues.

10. The point of view (who's speaking) and the logic in the poem should remain consistent. If your poem is surreal, don't try to make it sound realistic halfway through. Likewise, don't start out with an inanimate object in a serious poem and then suddenly make it start talking.

11. Don't be afraid to make changes.

– E. L.

In the Back Seat Was a Poet's Inspiration

ANY subject or image can be the basis for a poem. The one below – in two of its earlier drafts and then its final version – is based on an experience I had on Route 1 in Maine last summer. A station wagon in front of me seemed to be carrying black balloons in its back seat. As I got closer for a better look, I thought I saw a small rubber raft inflating. I sped up, and when I was practically on the wagon's bumper, I saw the outline of a large stuffed donkey. My curiosity burning, I moved beside the car and found myself staring at a live, chewing donkey. The driver offered a feeble grin in response to my laughter, and then she exited the highway. The challenge – and the fun – in writing the poem was deciding what to do with the scene once the narrative had been established.

First draft

Route One, behind
a station wagon. The driver's
head just clears the seat.
In back, black balloons, or
a small raft, inflating. Eyes
don't know the difference. Now
it's a stuffed donkey. Pass
the wagon as it exits the long
gray road. You're one ring of
a circus; ring two the tiny driver.
Last the donkey show, twitching
a little, sneezing, then
ducking below.

Third draft

Route One, Behind a Station Wagon

The driver's head just clears
the seat. In back, black balloons,
or a small raft, inflating. Now it's
a donkey who twitches a little, star of
a family show. The tiny ringleader waves
me along as she exits the long gray road.
I'm one more hopeful, seeking applause,
finding my place as I go, but the donkey
stands, steals my bow, then tucks himself below.

Final version

Route One, Behind a Station Wagon

The driver's head just clears
the seat. In back, black balloons
or a small raft, inflating. Now
it's a donkey who gapes, star
of a family show. The tiny ringleader waves
at her exit here on the narrow gray road.
I'm one more hopeful, seeking
applause, another ring in the circus.
But the donkey stands, steals
my bow, then tucks himself below.

– E. L.

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